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HSC on Assassinations

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CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM

29 November 1976

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. William W. Wells
Deputy Director for Operations

Mr. Theodore G. Shackley
Associate Deputy Director for Operations

VISIT

FROM : John Walker
O/SA/DO/O

SUBJECT : Visit to DDO's Office by Mr. Richard A. Sprague, Chief Counsel for the House Committee on Investigations of Assassinations

1. On 24 November 1976, Mr. Richard A. Sprague, Chief Counsel for the House Committee appointed to investigate the assassinations of former President John F. Kennedy and Civil Rights Leader Martin Luther King, visited the Headquarters building. Sprague was accompanied by Mr. Donovan Gay and Mr. Richard Feeney, members of his staff. Sprague's tour was conducted by Mr. Lyle Miller of the Office of Legislative Counsel.

2. During the course of his visit, Sprague received a briefing on the Registry conducted by Mr. Bruce Johnson. He also met briefly with those members of the CI Staff responsible for the Oswald files and with LA Division representatives in connection with the Cuban operations files.

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3. Sprague was disarming in manner. He constantly emphasized that he did not wish to discuss any classified materials until such time as he and his staff members received security clearances. He sympathized with the tremendous burden of work that various investigations had brought the Agency, and he expressed a hope that he could count on Agency personnel to assist him in analysis of the material provided. He hoped that he would not have to request removal of documents from the Headquarters building. He indicated a preference for being provided suitable space in which his investigators could review the documents on the premises and that such documents would be kept readily available in a secure location for scrutiny by his staff.

4. Sprague wanted assurance that no documents of interest to his investigators would be destroyed. He questioned the OLC representative sharply on this point by stating that it was his responsibility to decide which documents were "relevant" to his investigations and not the responsibility of the Agency to make this determination.

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5. In his conversations with Registry, Sprague appeared to accept and understand the capabilities of Registry to recover certain types of information. It was explained to him that the Registry was geared to names of people rather than to specific subjects. It was not in a position, for example, to produce a list of all American defectors to the Soviet Union, a question which was asked by him. He was told that such information might be available in other record keeping mechanisms. Donovan Gay asked whether or not it was possible to determine the names of persons who had checked specific names in Registry.

6. A specific line of query put forward by Sprague was in connection with the telephone tap material covering the period of Oswald's visit to Mexico City in late September and early October 1963. Sprague was clearly aware that such material existed. The CI staff representative answered his questions in a satisfactory manner but indicated that he could not be precise since he had not been aware that Sprague might wish to pursue this at this time. Sprague accepted this explanation. If doubts existed, it may well have been concerning the use of the word transcription. Sprague may have received the impression that portions of the transcription had been "erased" rather than the references to the tapes which were erased to be used for other transcriptions.

7. There are no conclusions that can be reached from this rather brief visit. It is obvious that Sprague has been doing his homework and that he is an investigator, not an inspector, who will explore each point of interest to an ultimate conclusion. It is also our impression that he will expect frank and open cooperation and that he will not prejudge the Agency for any sins of "omission or comission". He appreciates the vast amount of Cuban operation material which is being reviewed for possible references which may bear on the Kennedy assassination. He indicated that he would rely heavily on the Agency personnel who are reviewing ~~th~~is material. Concerning the Oswald holdings, Mr. Fenney expressed the opinion that they probably would take a chronological approach. Sprague did ask in a non-critical vein as to why the Agency waited so long to conduct an Agency review of the Cuban material. He was satisfied with the response that, following the report of the Warren Commission, personnel, at that time, probably were of the opinion that the investigation had been thoroughly and finally completed.

8. During his conversations, Sprague asked on several occasions whether or not CIA interviewed U.S. defectors to the Soviet Union on their return to the U.S. In reply, he was told that such interviews would be within FBI jurisdiction and any interviews would have been coordinated with the FBI. Those who were asked, however, did not know of any cases.

John Walker

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